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ABSTRACT

This document examines the notion of the "public humanities," the humanities as they exist outside the university. The work seeks to provide an intellectual rationale for the public humanities through a bibliographic essay, reflections on readings, and a bibliography for further reference. In a separate appendix, a sample "User's Guide" attempts to address the question heard from curious audiences at public programs: what are the humanities, anyway? The booklet attempts to capture the complexity and ambiguity of the humanities, identifies reasons why defining the humanities is so difficult, and addresses how it might be possible to talk about the humanities. The ideal outcome of a discussion of the public humanities would be a general realization among people that they have been using the humanities all along and that the humanities can provide the foundation for a thoughtful and informed life. (LBG)

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CULTURE'S NEW FRONTIER: Staking a Common Ground

Naomi F. Collins

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CULTURE'S NEW FRONTIER: Staking a Common Ground

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ACLS OCCASIONAL PAPER, No. 15

In the last several years ACLS has been working very closely with the Federation of State Humanities Councils. The report of the National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities (published as ACLS Occasional Paper No. 11) was the first result of this collaboration, and the two organizations have continued to cooperate since its publication. In addition, a number of individual humanities councils and learned societies have found new avenues for collaboration that have enlivened scholarship and enhanced public understanding of the humanities.

Despite these successes, however, the "public humanities" are neither well-known nor well-understood by many humanists in the academy, and recent trends in teaching and scholarship appear only fitfully in the public arena. This Occasional Paper, by Naomi Collins of the Maryland Humanities Council, attempts both to explain why bridges between the public humanities and the academic humanities have sometimes been difficult to build and to suggest some of the ways to strengthen such connections in the future. The essay is a primer of sorts that seeks to explain the two communities to each other. We publish it in the hope that it will inform and, ultimately, inspire closer relationships between academic humanists and the public whose cultural life they chronicle and interpret.

Imagine a world in which you were unable to write; imagine a world in which you were unable to read; imagine a world in which you were unable to look at any pictures; imagine a world in which you were unable to hear any music; imagine a world in which you knew nothing of other cultures so you did not know where you wanted to travel or if you wanted to travel; imagine a world in which you could not imagine, in which there was no fantasy, there were no novels, there was no science fiction, there was no poetry.

Finally, imagine a world in which there were no values, in which you did not have the word love, in which you did not have the word justice, in which you did not have the words right or wrong or good or evil.

Imagine a world without all these things. That would be a world without the humanities.

Catharine R. Stimpson
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Rutgers University, New Brunswick

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Introduction

Beyond university walls, the humanities moonlight. They engage citizens in literature discussions at public libraries; in re-creations of history at museums; and in debating civic, ethical, and community issues at public forums nationwide. The humanities inform videotapes on public television, dramatizations at historic places, interpretations at archaeological sites, and talks exploring performances of music and theatre. More Americans attend museums and historic sites than sporting events. Yet members of state humanities councils, university and college faculty, professionals at museums, media, and historical associations ask: what is the intellectual rationale for these "extramural" humanities?

Discomfort is mutual between scholars and the public. Scholars fear compromising the intellectual rigor, discipline, and precision of the humanities; they wonder about the integrity of the disciplines in the un-refereed arena. The general public wants to know: what are the humanities, anyway, and what do they have to do with me? Members of state councils struggle to mediate the two, to meld scholarly discourse and public curiosity into a vigorous exchange benefiting (and befitting) not only the specialist and the generalist, but the humanities themselves.

The public humanities — humanities outside the university — are hardly yet a "field." The subject lacks a body of readings, bibliography, or primer; it causes reference librarians to blanch in their search for a call number or subject heading.

This essay is for those who teach, write, and think about humanities disciplines in colleges and universities, and for those engaged in interpreting humanities disciplines for the public at state humanities councils, museums, libraries, historic sites, and media. It seeks to provide an intellectual rationale for the public humanities through a bibliographic essay, reflections on the readings, and a bibliography for further reference. It closes with personal observations suggesting ways to go beyond traditional thinking to a bold new common ground, a new frontier for the humanities.

In a separate Appendix, a sample "User's Guide" provides an attempt to address the question heard from curious audiences at public

programs: what are the humanities, anyway? It seeks to capture the complexity and ambiguity of the humanities, identify reasons why defining the humanities is so difficult, and address how we might talk about the humanities.

Offered in the spirit of the humanities, the essay, conclusion, bibliography, and guide are not intended as definitive or doctrinal. They reflect the view that for those of us who strive to bring the thinking, methods, insights, perspectives, and vision of the humanities to the general public, some of our hardest work begins before the public programs: in thinking about the intellectual justification for our endeavor, and in talking about what we do in a way non-specialists can understand.

One ideal outcome of the public dialogue might be that the proverbial man and woman in the street would realize (and, ideally, note on network prime time) that — like Moliere's would-be gentleman astonished to discover he had been speaking prose all his life — they have been "using" and relying on the humanities all theirs: the question is not whether, but how well; and that the humanities are not frills or mysteries, but a foundation and approach to a thoughtful and informed life.

Viewing the Public Humanities: A Bibliographic Essay

Problem of Definition

"To celebrate curiosity and useless knowledge: that is what the Greeks called *anthropinon* and the Romans translated *humanum*, an activity appropriate to humanity, hence the humanities." That, noted David Daiches in a 1987 speech, is the reason Fellows gather at the National Humanities Center. Without these activities, he quotes 17th-century antiquary Sir William Dugdale observing, " '. . . man falls into a beastly sottishness and his life is no better to be accounted for than to be buried alive.' " (National Humanities Center *Newsletter*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Winter 1987, pp. 5.)

The term humanities seems an obvious place to begin. It is also the most difficult. People working in the humanities are often asked to cure sick dogs, provide disaster relief, or — most difficult — to explain to friends or family what they do. People sometimes confuse the word "humanities" with the words "humane" and "humanitarian," sometimes chafe at the abstractness of the term.

The literature addressing the humanities shows that it is easier to describe than define them. But it quickly becomes clear that descriptions and definitions of the humanities themselves affect the way we talk about the complex relationship of the humanities "in," "and," or "to" American public life, the role of the humanities outside the university.

It is useful to see that the recent work, *The Humanities and the American Promise* (a product of the Colloquium on the Humanities and the American People, written by Merrill Peterson) chooses deliberately to substitute for concise definition ". . . general observations on the character and value of the humanities." The humanities, the report notes:

> . . . have both a personal and a civic dimension . . . take the long perspective . . . represent the striving for coherence and synthesis . . . may be and often are disturbers of the peace . . . have a moral dimension . . . deal with ends as well as means . . . [and] cultivate critical intelligence . . . .

The report views the humanities, then, not as a series of disciplines, categories, boundaries, and delimitations, but in terms of role, process, meaning, value, and ends.

Another major report, the 1980 Report of the Commission on the Humanities (usually called the Rockefeller Commission report), concedes ". . . how difficult it is for any committee to discuss the humanities." This is reflected in opening efforts to grapple with the term itself, requiring about three pages. There the Commission notes that:

> . . . the humanities mirror our own image and our image of the world. Through the humanities we reflect on the fundamental question: what does it mean to be human? The humanities offer clues but never a complete answer. They reveal how people have tried to make moral, spiritual, and intellectual sense of a world in which irrationality, despair, loneliness, and death are as conspicuous as birth, friendship, hope, and reason. We learn how individuals or societies define the moral life and try to attain it, attempt to reconcile freedom and the responsibilities of citizenship, and express themselves artistically.

The report goes on to state that the humanities ". . . by awakening a sense of what it might be like to be someone else or to live in another time or culture, . . . tell us about ourselves, stretch our imagination, and enrich our experience. They increase our distinctively human potential." More specifically, the humanities ". . . presume particular methods of expression and inquiry — language, dialogue, reflection, imagination, and metaphor . . . [with the aims of] insight, perspective, critical understanding, discrimination, and creativity." And further, that whether defined by questions, methods, or fields, the humanities employ a particular medium and turn of mind: the former, language; the latter, historic. The report concludes that:

> The essence of the humanities is a spirit or an attitude toward humanity. They show how the individual is autonomous and at the same time bound, in the ligatures of language and history, to humankind across time and throughout the world. The humanities are an important measure of the values and aspirations of any society.

The description of the humanities in the 1964 Report of the Commission on the Humanities of the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) *et al.* emphasized four components in its statement:

> The humanities may be regarded as a body of knowledge and insight, as modes of expression, as a program for education, as an underlying attitude toward life.

They elaborate:

> The body of knowledge is usually taken to include the study of history, literature, the arts, religion, and philosophy. The fine and the performing arts are modes of expressing thoughts and feelings visually, verbally, and aurally. The method of education is one based on the liberal tradition we inherit from classical antiquity. The attitude toward life centers on concern for the human individual: for his emotional development, for his moral, religious, and aesthetic ideas, and for his goals — including in particular his growth as a rational being and a responsible member of his community.

And Catharine R. Stimpson, in "A Welcome Treaty: The Humanities in Everyday Life" (in *Where the Meanings Are*) observes that:

> Boldly conceived, the humanities are the way in which we understand history, the past. They also provoke moral questions and the moral imagination. They often suggest that we ground the moral imagination in the belief in the absolute worth of the individual human person. . . . However, the humanities will give us neither accurate history nor a richly-grounded moral imagination unless they represent the realities and culture of everyday life.

Finally, Charles Frankel, whose vision was central to the founding of the National Endowment for the Humanities, observed in "Why the Humanities?" (reprinted in Agresto and in Tolo) the contradiction inherent in the humanities:

> Although I would like to try, I shall not seek to offer a general definition of the elusive phrase 'the humanities.' But I should like to focus on some curious features of the humanities. . . . The humanities are a curious combination of involvement and detachment; of the search for scientific objectivity and irrepressible personal idiosyncrasy; of piety toward the past and the critique of the past; of private passion and public commitment.

Eloquent, inclusive, articulate, all these descriptions of the humanities, but sufficiently complex to make simple re-statement difficult.

Private Value and Public Role:

Implicit in these observations is a basic dualism. The split is between what people see as the humanities' individual and their public dimensions, their private value and public role, their personal and civic application. This bifurcation is significant, and central to discussion surrounding the humanities themselves, their relation to "public life," and the more specific question of "applying" the humanities to "public policy." Although most writers acknowledge both roles for the humanities, in stressing one over the other, they shape the outcome of their argument for the "use" of the humanities, provide a foundation from which their arguments on the public value of the humanities derive.

This dichotomy has historic roots and political implications, complicated by claims on both sides that the other is partisan or political. Complex, theoretical, historical, and philosophical, this dialectic affords an ideal subject for continuing and guaranteed lively humanities discussion.

For example, the Federation of State Humanities Councils (formerly, the National Federation of State Humanities Councils), in its presentation booklet emphasizes the personal (and disciplinary) dimensions:

> The humanities are ways of thinking about what is human — about our diverse histories, imaginations, values, words, and dreams. The humanities analyze, interpret, and refine our experience, its comedies and tragedies, struggles and achievements. They embrace history and art history, literature and film, philosophy and morality, comparative religion, jurisprudence, political theory, languages and linguistics, anthropology, and some of the inquiries of the social sciences. When we ask who we are, and what our lives ought to mean, we are using the humanities. (*State Councils*, 1985, p. 1.)

Peterson's report, *The Humanities and the American Promise*, on the other hand, stresses the public role of the humanities. It is ". . . their capacity to change, elevate, and improve both the common civic life and individual lives that make the cultivation of the humanities important to the American people." In Jeffersonian terms, the report argues for the importance of the humanities in ". . . providing the nurturing environment of a reflective and informed public will," toward a vision of ". . . an

educated citizenry sharing fully in the civic life and of a nation leading the world by power of its example." A heady vision, and, by his own account, ". . . an act of national faith and national courage."

Not everyone regards action as the essential — or desirable — "use" of the humanities. William J. Bennett, for example, when he served as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), stressed the private side, the view that ". . . the purpose of learning is to save the soul and enlarge the mind;" that ". . . developing a sensibility," ". . . qualities of the mind and heart," and ". . . intellectual refinement and spiritual elevation are the traditional goals of the humanities, and should remain so."

Lynne V. Cheney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, in her recent report *Humanities in America* also stresses the private dimension of the humanities:

> The humanities move us with images, arguments, and stories about what it means to be human: to mourn mortality for ourselves and those we love; to know joy and find purpose, nonetheless; to be capable of good and evil, wisdom and folly.

But she also supports the public role for the humanities, or, as stated in *Humanities,* December, 1988 (pp. 7), the ". . . remarkable blossoming of the humanities in the public sphere." She emphasizes in the article and the report a public thirst for learning, now met in part by the "parallel school" — educational programs for adults developed by libraries, museums, media, and state councils. And she concludes with the recommendation that ". . . in a democratic society, the humanities — those areas of study that bring us the deeds and thoughts of other times — should be part of every life."

The colloquium report by Peterson does not discount the personal dimension of the humanities either. The report notes that the humanities bring meaning to the life of the individual; they provide ". . . a reflective approach" that stands in opposition to its alternative: ". . . a life unilluminated by imagination, uninformed by history, unguided by reasoning — in short, the 'unexamined life' that Socrates described as not worth living." However, without denying the value of personal enrichment, the report sees the humanities — particularly as conveyed by scholars in the humanities disciplines — as central to informed civic

discourse, and to consideration of the major questions that confront our society; and "action" as "follow[ing] from and guided by reflection."

The report's recommendations reflect this emphasis, concluding that "... the most important public mission of the humanities is improvement of the quality of civic discourse," and that the humanities "... should reclaim a role of leadership in American democracy." These should be accomplished, in part, through the strengthening and invigoration of humanities education at all levels, including public education efforts by universities; encouragement of public programs in the humanities; advancement of a broadly inclusive cultural literacy; and new roles for scholars in the public arena.

Charles Frankel describes the value of the humanities to the individual ("this strange exercise in involvement and detachment") as resting on a faith:

> the faith that as human beings grow more conscious of themselves and what they are doing, more self-aware and self-critical, they do not reduce their enjoyment of life, but intensify it; the faith that discrimination and taste do not weary the emotions but make them fresh.

Nor does William Bennett ignore the public role. He notes that the humanities are "... really about the essential business of life in a free society. ... That, as Madison said, 'What we read determines what we do.'" (Quoted in Hardison, "NEH at Twenty," *Change*). Bennett characterizes the role of the humanities, in regard to public policy, as addressing "... the conditions, the dreams, hopes, fears, disappointments, failures, and aspirations in the lives of those who make and who are affected by public policy." "The most important contribution the study of the humanities makes to public policy," he argues, "... is the sound education — the development of the minds and sensibilities — of the young men and women who will make public policy in the future" ("The Humanities ...," *The Humanist As Citizen*).

The Rockefeller Commission Report also stresses both private and civic dimensions in alternating paragraphs (pp. 11-13). It states that:

> The humanities, by emphasizing our common humanity, contribute especially to the social purpose of learning — to education

for civic participation, which has been a strong theme in American society since the days of Jefferson.

Further, "[t]he humanities lead beyond 'functional' literacy and basic skills to critical judgment and discrimination, enabling citizens to view political issues from an informed perspective." But the report goes on to state explicitly that "[a]lthough the humanities pertain to citizenship, they also have an integrity of their own." They serve and sustain other values than civic ones — ". . . privacy, intimacy, and distance from civic life. . . "; individuality as manifest in judgment and detachment from political activity; pursuit of ". . . matters of value without defining value as social utility," and ". . . intensely personal insights into the recesses of experience." As for the relationship of the private and public spheres, the report notes: "The humanities illuminate relationships between the public and private notions of individuality. The two sometimes reinforce each other, sometimes remain indifferent to each other. They often pull away from each other, and are at times irreparably divided."

The recommendations of the Rockefeller Commission Report begin with improving the quality of education in elementary and secondary schools. They go on to include: supporting research in the humanities; sufficient funding for cultural institutions to meet preservation and education missions; reaffirmation of the value of the humanities by educators; collaborations among educational and cultural institutions and sources of support for the humanities; clarifying the terms of the cultural debate (beyond the "elitism" and "populism" poles); and connecting the humanities, science, and technology. Summary of this 180-page report hardly does justice to its extensive findings, but does illustrate the complexity of the issues, and some persistent themes in their proposed solutions.

Clearly, then, while most discussion ascribes some measure of both individual and public value to the humanities, most writers stress one element over the other. The place at which the individual and public dimensions are seen to connect is in the civic vision expressed by Jefferson and Madison, a vision of action guided by reflection. It is on this philosophic base that public support for the public humanities is justified.

One philosophic foundation not addressed in these discussions is a public role for the humanities rooted in the American tradition of

pragmatism. In a paper "Towards Becoming More Fully Human — A Pragmatic Approach," co-developed by this author and A.R.C. Westwood for an international symposium on the theme "What Does It Mean To Be Human," it is argued that the need to address pressing questions of human concern in the absence of definitive answers calls for a pragmatic approach, using the understanding we have available to us to help deal with value-dependent issues we face for the 21st century. It argues that although there may be no ultimate answer to the question of what it means to be human, the question calls for global public discourse "... so that all the citizens of the world may not only be part of the answer to the question, 'what does it mean to be human,' but also active and joyful participants in the enquiry."

Historical Antecedents, Theory, and Public Policy Application

The volatile issue of "applying" the humanities to "public policy" raises additional complex and controversial issues, best discussed through a history of the theories on which arguments on both sides are rooted. These are found in three related collections of readings: *The Public Humanities: An Old Role in Contemporary Perspective*, 1984, based on two state council-supported colloquia of 1983, contains six papers, annotated bibliography, an overview/appendix, and an introduction by its editors, French and Moreno; and two related volumes of the Hastings Center, *On the Uses of the Humanities: Vision and Application*, 1984, containing seven sections, and its companion volume of 1985, *Applying the Humanities*, including 17 chapters in six sections. Three essays in the first volume were reprinted in the same or revised form in the third.

That their discussion was not easy was acknowledged by the authors of these reports, noting that their meetings "... produced lively and sometimes heated discussions ... [that] brought out clearly the tensions and suspicions that still exist between 'disciplinary' and 'applied' humanities ...."

History and Theory

"The Humanities have an ancient and complex relationship to public policy," Bruce Sievers observes in the opening sentence of his overview of *The Public Humanities*. He sees the basis of this relationship in what he characterizes as "... the dialectic of contemplation and activity ... thought and action ... individual enlightenment and social

action;" — or (as he attributes to Charles Drekmeier), ". . . the tension between knowledge as virtue and knowledge as power." Sievers suggests that this debate is based in disparate world views: the view that ideas which stem from the humanities have immediate and powerful social consequences, against the view that humanities are best suited to the development of minds and sensibilities.

Another analysis of issues surrounding this split is provided by David Little in "Storm over the Humanities: The Sources of Conflict" (in the same volume, and also in *Applying the Humanities*). Reviewing historical background in the thought of Aristotle, Erasmus, Hobbes, and others, Little theorizes that the split in Western thought can be traced to a "great divide" in 16th-century thinking between, broadly speaking, Renaissance and Reformation views. He concludes by arguing that we accept our inheritance of both traditions, respect and preserve both in viewing the role of the humanities today.

Martha Nussbaum, in exploring earlier roots of the division, addresses the views of ancient Greek philosophers in an essay in *Applying the Humanities*. In it, she suggests that although the ancient Greeks did not then use the term humanities for inquiry and knowledge, they asked the essential question ". . . whether the end of a form of inquiry was public or private." In the early period they ". . . defended some form of the view that intellectual study was appropriate and valuable only insofar as it made some contribution to the practical, that is, to the good lives of human beings." She argues that ". . . the separation between study and the practical that gives our term *applied* its force for us was not a datum of the intellectual life of our tradition. It was gradual, it had a complex origin, and it was always a matter for the most serious controversy."

After discussing the *paideia*, and its aim, ". . . the production of good citizens, sound in both body and character," the plays of Aristophanes, the writings of Thucydides, Nussbaum concludes that ". . . the group of studies that were the ancestors of our humanities . . . were agreed, in 5th-century Greece, to have a purely instrumental function . . . were *useful* ethically and socially — either because they motivated and educated young people toward mature social values or because they reinforced and supported these values in adults, or because they provided information that was in some other way useful to the political and ethical ends of the city."

Nussbaum sees a shift in view with Socrates and Plato (with Socrates' well-known insistence on self-knowledge), but claims that they still saw inquiry as ethical and political — never severed from the "... general aspiration to lead a good human life in a city." However, their emphasis on the intrinsic value of study gives rise to the tension between competing values: the pursuit of contemplation vs. the fulfillment of social ends.

Aristotle, she notes, later created a more basic split, separating forms of inquiry into two groups — those whose ends are the improvement of practice, and those whose ends increase theoretical understanding alone, that is, pure inquiry separated from ethical and political aims. But, she adds, it took Epicurus to separate both theory and practice from the city, creating a separation that she sees as preparing the way for the modern ideal of the "ivory tower."

This may be as good a place as any to note that the complexities surrounding discussion of the humanities and public life are not simplified by seeking historic roots. Although there is not a single view of the history of the humanities, it is generally stated that the term "humanities" is of Roman origin, and that modern use of the term derives from the Renaissance application of the term "humanism" to the study of rediscovered ancient Greek and Latin texts (on all subjects: not simply on what we now view as the humanities). (It has also been said that this was actually a 19th-century usage, applying the term retrospectively to the Renaissance.) What does seem clear is that the creation of formal academic disciplines on the scientific model, as we think of them today, is a late 19th-century creation; and that the application of the term "humanities" to specific disciplines (and to one of three branches of knowledge, the other two, science and social science) is a 20th-century invention (clearly not yet graced by consensus concerning categories, content, or curricula).

Works on the theory and philosophy, meaning and value, of the humanities disciplines in general, and on specific disciplines in particular (literary criticism, history, philosophy, language, and the arts) — but not focused primarily on the relation of these fields to public life — are extensive, and beyond the scope of this work. Worth noting, however, are two special issues of *Daedalus* devoted to "The Future of the Humanities," and "Theory in Humanistic Study." Although they date back about 20 years, and theoretical formulations within humanities

disciplines have changed considerably during this period, many essays in these volumes are still germane, provocative, and profound.

The essays in these volumes were in part responses to student activism and attendant demands for "relevance," and to perceived challenges from the social sciences to claim humanities' territory. These works, and the volume *The Future of the Modern Humanities* (papers delivered at the [British] Jubilee Congress of the Modern Humanities Research Association in August, 1968) address a variety of issues in education, cognition, cultural content, purposes and ends of study. [Interestingly, none of the 35 essays in these three volumes reflects the distaff half of humanity.]

. . . and Ties to Public Policy

Turning from the broad area of the humanities to the more specific area of the humanities and "public policy," it is useful to look at the possible roles for the humanities Daniel Callahan identifies in "The Humanities and Public Policy" (in *The Public Humanities* and in *Applying the Humanities*). He begins by drawing distinctions among "public policy," "public policy analysis," and "public policymaking." He defines "public policy" as:

> . . . the aggregate collection of those actions undertaken by government, either by omission or commission, to advance the welfare of its citizens and the protection and advancement of its national interests;

and argues that no one has denied the pertinence of the humanities to such concerns, but rather questions the nature of that pertinence. He asks:

> If a fundamental purpose of the humanities is to reflect upon and to attempt to understand the human condition, to explore questions of ends, meanings, and interpretation, justifications, past memories and present purposes, then how can they fail to have something of value for the information of public policy?

Callahan proceeds to explore the two significant challenges to this view: the first, from the side of the humanities, that they are not suited to the solution of political and economic dilemmas, that they cannot be true to themselves if they take on issues that are transitory, political and technical; the second, from the side of public policy, that the issues

are practical and technical, not theoretical and philosophical. He notes, however, that while both sides oppose a bond between the humanities and public policy, they share the belief that each pursuit is worthy and valuable in its own right.

He outlines the debate in the field of policy analysis between what might be characterized as the value free or positivist model, and the "interpretive" view of policy as "art" or "craft"; and contends that there is a place for the humanities in both these views, as well as in bringing them together. The models he sees for the relationship of the humanities to public policy are those of the social sciences. He enumerates these (crediting their formulation to others) as:

— the social engineer model, the direct application of knowledge to questions, as in applied ethics;
— the clinical model, interacting with decision-makers to help clarify goals and objectives;
— the enlightenment model, developing broad scale studies of complex issues;
— the nonparticipation model of independent academicians and researchers; and
— the sub-interdisciplinary model, developing a special field of study drawn from work in more than one field, such as bioethics.

He concludes that there are a plurality of ways for the humanities to interact with policy questions; but that they should avoid the pitfalls of playing handmaiden (not keeping critical distance); and of becoming pretentious (assuming they have final wisdom, exclusive means of seeking it, or greater purity). "If it is true [he observes] that policy analysis and policymaking ... are in essence oriented toward action and not thought or theory, then it is possible to agree that there is a basic difference between the sphere of the humanities and that of policy." But the two indispensable contributions the humanities have to make are: "... the formation of character ... the traits and virtues necessary for citizens to make sound and sensitive judgments," and "... providing alternative perspectives, frameworks, and visions."

In a distinctly opposing view, Robert Hollander argues before the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities that the attempt to make the humanities relevant to public policy is a mistake, as is the assumption that "real humanities" are beyond the ken of the general public. This thinking, he believes, results in assuming that the public requires

"... watered down 'humanistic' programs which are ill-disguised ventures into political and social enthusiasms and which more often stir up feelings than produce thought." He contends that the intentions in founding the NEH and state programs was to support the humanities themselves — the search for knowledge in the disciplines and the dissemination of this knowledge.

Most discussion of the humanities and public policy has somehow to address the issue of "advocacy." Roderick French confronts the issue directly, first noting that he does not equate "advocacy" with bias or dogmatism (in "On Taking Sides: An Academic Perspective on Advocacy," in *The Public Humanities*). He argues that historically and pragmatically:

> "Humanities scholarship, when it is not moribund, is a continuous argument between and among the advocates of differing interpretations, sometimes irreconcilable interpretations of some dimension of human experience"; that "... the great humanists have always been advocates of alternatives," and that " '[o]bjectivity' in the humanities is never more than the current consensus of the best scholarship."

French's concern is that the fear of advocacy may conflict with the history and character of the humanities themselves, or with the value of the humanities in the life of society.

Tying the personal and political dimensions of the humanities, John William Ward wrote in his introduction to the 1985 ACLS Commission Report:

> In a democratic culture, humanistic learning must, perforce, rest on the belief that more than a select few can see and imagine and act as do the best few. Learning is involved in how to live a life, not how to make a living. Humanistic learning is involved in those fundamental questions of what life is all about. So humanistic learning is deeply political, not political in the foolish sense that people called "humanists" have practical answers to concrete social issues, but political in the sense that humanistic learning is centered on the individual who has important questions about self and society. To learn some of the answers to those questions means the fullest and richest and most imaginative development of every single self — at least, in a democratic culture.

And Robert Bellah takes the discussion in a different direction, asserting that the right relation between the humanities and public life requires more than "... the application of technical humanistic disciplines to specific problems of public policy." He sees in the place of individualistic ideologies a reforging of "... our relation to the past, to time and memory," without which the development of a social vision is impossible. He concludes in his essay, "The Public Humanities and Social Vision" (published in similar versions in *The Public Humanities* and in *Applying the Humanities*), that:

> Social vision cannot be manufactured on the basis of present need or feeling alone, but always involves an effort to discern what is good in itself and how that might be embodied. Tradition as living memory is ... the creative reappropriation of the past in the context of present reality. Thus a sense of the past and a sense of the future are intrinsically related: if we destroy one we destroy the other.

Many collections of essays, speeches, proceedings, and reports addressing themes in the humanities and public policy, and in public life in general, have been published by the Federation of State Humanities Councils over its lifetime. (Some are listed in the bibliography.) These publications provide valuable discussion on topics in theory and practice, programs and disciplines, enhanced by authors' experience in both the academic and public dimensions of the humanities. The 1988 annual conference of the Federation saw a return to consideration of "public policy" programming, and a call for new views on this subject, an area addressed below.

Civic and Community Life

Questions of whether and how the humanities can be "applied" to "public policy" clearly elicit a range of views. However, broad consensus exists that the humanities have at least two related and significant functions in public life: civic and educational. Most writers agree that the humanities play a major role in creating an informed and enlightened citizenry in a democracy, and in conveying the content and methods of history, language and literature, philosophy, and other humanities disciplines to American adults. (A 1980 Federation publication tellingly named "The Extracurricular Curriculum," uses the term "public pedagogy" for the activity of state councils, teaching humanities outside the classroom.)

Not surprisingly, justification for public support of the humanities has been based on a consensus concerning the importance of the humanities to the public life of a democracy, the civic value on which there is general agreement even among those who disagree in other areas. The United States Congress, when it created the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1965, echoed themes sounded by Thomas Jefferson in his vision for the United States . . . that civic participation in a democracy requires a deeply informed and educated citizenry, and that in a democracy, humanism is itself a civic ideal.

In its eloquent justification for this decision, Congress stated:

> A high civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone, but must give full value and support to the other great branches of man's scholarly and cultural activity in order to achieve a better understanding of the past, a better analysis of the present, and a better view of the future . . . that democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens, and that it must therefore foster and support a form of education designed to make men masters of their technology and not its unthinking servant. . . . [Therefore] it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to help create and sustain not only a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry, but also the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent. (Declaration of Purpose, 20 USC 951, Sec. 2.)

Other writing on the history and rationale for the National Endowment for the Humanities includes the writings and speeches of Charles Frankel, and the article by O.B. Hardison in *Change,* which provides not only an institutional history, but also an overview of the changing premises concerning the humanities in American life. Other unpublished documents provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities provide mileposts and background on the history of the agency itself.

Charles Frankel, whose publication listing fills a 12-page bibliography (in Agresto, *The Humanist as Citizen*), justifies public support for the humanities in a dramatic statement in "Why the Humanities?" (reprinted in both Agresto and Tolo):

> What will our country offer its members as a diet for their minds and souls? They are the citizens of a free society. They must make

> their own decisions about the good, the true, and the beautiful, as well as about the genuine article and the fake, the useful and the useless, the profitable and the unprofitable. . . . What images of human possibility will American society put before its members? What standards will it suggest to them as befitting the dignity of the human spirit? What delicate balance among human employments will it exhibit? Will it speak to them only of success and celebrity and the quick fix that makes them happy, or will it find a place for grace, elegance, nobility, and sense of connection with the human adventure? What cues will be given to our citizens, those who are living and those still to be born, that will indicate to them the values authoritative institutions of our nations, such as our governments, national, state, and local, and our halls of learning, regard as of transcendent importance? These are the questions that I believe are really at issue when we consider the place of the humanities on the national scene and the role that government should play in their care and feeding.

Reports by Commissions of the ACLS and others in 1964 and 1985 provide cogent and often eloquent arguments. The concise 1964 report that proposed creation of a federal agency for support of the humanities concluded that:

> All men [and we might now add "women"] require that a vision be placed before them, an ideal toward which they might strive. . . . It is both the dignity and the duty of humanists to offer their fellow countrymen whatever understandings can be attained by fallible human beings of such enduring values as justice, freedom, virtue, beauty, and truth. Only thus do we join ourselves to the heritage of our nation and our human kind.

And the 1985 report affirmed that the very existence of NEH "says a resounding yes to the question whether humanistic learning and scholarship is important to American culture and to the American people."

The Role of the Scholar

Although consensus is broad on the role of the humanities in civic life (and unformed on their specific application to public policy), debate arises over the role of the humanities scholar in the public arena. Much discussion is rooted in the dichotomy discussed above between the

personal and public value of the humanities, and between theory and practice. Although there are two sides to the dilemma which Richard Hofstadter characterized for scholars as being "... caught between their desire to count in the world and their desire to understand it ..." (*The Progressive Historians*, New York, 1968), most arguments on the role of the scholar in public life are advanced by those who favor a public role, and write to clarify the nature, and advocate the value, of the scholar's contribution.

In "The Humanities in Public Conversation," John Churchill links the issue of public policy with that of the role of the scholar by asserting that "... humanists are scholars in the humanities, and the humanities are studies of the human dimension in affairs of all sorts." Therefore, although public policy problems are often presented as issues in politics, town planning, economics, or some other area of apparent technical expertise, "... public affairs are, at root, human problems." He delineates five ways that scholars can help public discussion, by:

— "... clarifying the conceptual underpinnings of issues;"
— "... convey[ing] an awareness of past thought and action into the present as a resource to be used critically in understanding of contemporary issues;"
— coordinating points of view;
— articulating the ethical dimensions of public policy; and
— "creating problems."

Thus, he sees humanists as "... analysts of the present, ... curators of the past, ... synthesizers of possibilities ... deliberators about value ... [and] speculators, proposers, and wonderers."

A.J.R. Russell-Wood in addressing the role of the scholar in the broad field of public programs in the humanities, begins with the caveat that: "Not all scholars are humanists, not all humanists are scholars, and not every scholar or humanist is suitable for public programs." He proceeds to identify three key missions for the scholar:

— "... to remove the veil, real or perceived, which makes the humanities remote from everyday life;"
— "... to instill in the public an awareness that to study the humanities is to study the human experience across time and space and realisation that we are but a point on a human continuum from the past through to the future;" and

— to "... share the step by step process of humanistic enquiry which is honest, rigorous, analytical, and critical."

The special qualities the scholar should bring to the process he describes as:

> . . . a sense of adventure, an openness to challenge, intellectual curiosity . . . , modesty born of recognition of personal limitations, an interest in people, a sense of humour, a generosity of spirit . . . and total conviction of the importance of the humanities as providing greater understanding of the human condition. . . .

(In *Humanities*, the NEH publication of November/December 1988; printed in a modified version, in *Maryland Humanities*, Winter 1988.)

The ACLS, in addressing "The Humanities in the University: Strategies for the 1990's," at its April 1988 annual conference, heard papers from Roderick French and Merrill Peterson stressing benefits to scholars and the public of humanities dialogue outside the university; and at its 1987 conference, Jamil Zainaldin's presentation urged scholars to support the mission of state councils to promote the "... integration of the humanities into public life by bridging the academy with the community."

If there is some consensus on the unique role and value of humanities scholarship in public discourse and public programs, and less agreement on its connection to public policy (although few would contend that humanities scholarship actually harms public policy consideration), there is debate over whether this need is well met. William Bennett in this regard notes that:

> The obligation is on the humanist to do more than complain, but actively to bring the humanities to public policy planning. . . . What we need is a few more good men and women who, through their own drive and excellence, will accept the always present public invitation, who will write good books, do well-considered and directed research that will put good ideas into circulation, and who, most important of all, will teach what the humanities can do, not merely by proclaiming what they can do, but by doing it ("The Humanities . . ., " *The Humanist As Citizen*).

Lynne Cheney, in *The Humanities in America* argues that "... the methods of scholars, like the subjects they deal with, have become

highly specialized. . . . [and that] the new theoretical approaches have further isolated scholars" from the public. She attributes to these trends the creation of a deep chasm between the academy and society.

The ACLS Occasional Paper No. 7, "Speaking for the Humanities," refutes Cheney's arguments in a publication derived from a meeting of humanities scholars. It argues that ". . . the problems are almost always more complicated than the popular interpretation allows," and that ". . . the difficulties stigmatized in recent indictments are the consequence of the virtues of the system." Specifically, ". . . those things now identified as failings in the humanities actually indicate their enlivening transformations. The characteristic approach of the humanities has always been to ask questions," and that is what teachers are now doing, in asking questions about 'canon,' curriculum, the organization of knowledge, and political and educational governance.

Ron Perrin's response to Lynne Cheney's report (in the *Chronicle*, September 27, 1989), notes that her characterization of the "parallel school" is apt, and much of what she has to say is telling, but that too many people ". . . continue to drive divisive wedges between the state councils and the universities, between public humanities and academic scholarship." He urges colleges and universities ". . . to strive seriously and consistently to forge links between their work and the public," in a collaboration which in the end has value and benefits to universities and scholars as well as to the public.

Within the profession, Richard H. Kohn, addressing colleagues in the American Historical Association's *Perspectives*, decries the fact that while public history steadily expands its clientele, professional historians ignore public interest and demand. He calls on his fellow historians to:

> reconnect the profession with our clientele in the educational world and amongst the public — those reading books and imbibing history from media, museums, and local and regional historical organizations across the country.

The Princeton scholar Victor Brombert, in his Presidential Address to the Modern Language Association at its December 1989 annual conference, sounded a similar call to his colleagues:

> As scholars and teachers of literature we must not only train specialists, but engage in meaningful humanistic discourse with the larger community of students — and beyond the world of the university, with the general public. . . . if we speak only to ourselves as inbred experts who alone are capable of stimulating and communicating with one another, then we betray our most basic function, and are led into an impasse. (As quoted in the *Washington Post*, December 29, 1989, pp. D1 and D9.)

And in an inspired commentary on the broad subject "The Scholar in Society," Wayne Booth argued in a 1981 publication of the Modern Language Association that to be seen by the public as something other than a "priestly cult," scholars need to return to the American tradition of ***haute vulgarisation*** (of chautauquas, lyceums, and literary journalism), to speak in a language the public can understand. He draws an early distinction among intellectuals, drudges, missionaries, publicists, scientists, and scholars; and concludes by identifying private and public virtues the scholar ideally can contribute to society: honesty, courage, persistence, consideration (of other views), and humility.

And Catharine Stimpson, on a related theme, advocates "a treaty between the humanities and everyday life," arguing that "humanistic scholarship [can be] about everyday life," and "can work *for* everyday life," based on the proposition that humanities "texts, pictures, scores, records, sounds, languages, signs . . . represent people in action . . . . [and] [h]umanistic scholarship codifies, organizes, these representations of people in action" (in "A Welcome Treaty," in *Where the Meanings Are*).

A broad treatment of American cultural life, Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* identifies an ". . . impoverishment of public culture" resulting from the absence of younger ". . . public intellectuals, writers and thinkers who address a general and educated audience." Jacoby argues that although ". . . the relationship between 'private' and 'public' intellectual work is complex," the greatest minds in the past were not content with private discovery, and sought a public. Today, he notes, intellectuals are almost exclusively in universities, in which rather than " . . . employ the vernacular," or master a ". . . public idiom," they write for professional journals that ". . . create insular societies." Jacoby claims there is a public for ideas — as witness the success of recent books by

older intellectuals (which he cites); that, in fact, the "eclipse" is not of the public, but of the public intellectual.

About ten years earlier, Charles Frankel had addressed the role of the scholar in public life from the opposite side, noting the benefit to the scholar of his involvement in civic affairs:

> Humanistic scholarship grows — in the end it develops confidence, freshness, original ideas — when it is fed not by its own professional concerns alone but by the doings of human beings outside the study. . . . And when humanistic scholars have been persuaded that they are really part of the larger community, they have also made the largest contributions to their own disciplines. Plato, Machiavelli, Erasmus, John Locke, Diderot, James Madison, Ralph Waldo Emerson are not remembered for being intellectual recluses ("Why the Humanities?" reprinted in Agresto and Tolo).

The Content of the Culture

If there is consensus that the value of the humanities in public life is to provide for informed civic discourse in a democracy, and that scholars can play a major role in framing and informing this discourse, passionate and sometimes uncivil debate arises over content. Whose humanities? What is the content of the culture being conveyed (in the university and in the public arena)? How should content be determined? (Value questions again: not the value of the humanities, but the values in humanities selection and substance.) In discussions often framed as much by contemporary political categories as by educational concerns, subject to charges of politicization on both sides, and complicated by code words, additional polarities are posed in considering cultural content: elitist vs. popular, standards vs. relativism, excellence vs. equity, coherence vs. fragmentation, classic vs. multi-ethnic, canon vs. pluralism, exclusionary vs. inclusionary.

Discussions may pit Bennett, Bloom, and Hirsch (who themselves do not hold a single position) as "traditionalists" against those who support the broadening of the canon to include texts that have "... contributed to important struggles by women, blacks, minorities, and other subordinate groups to lay claim to their own voices, . . . works marginalized by the official canon" (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 29, 1989, by Henry A. Giroux and Harvey J. Kaye).

Catharine Stimpson envisions the creation of "... a cultural democracy ... a republic of discourse," in which we seek a diversity in unity, and "... together create a new concept of citizenship that respects a multi-vocal, heteroglossic culture" (*Humanities Discourse*, Vol. 3, Number 1, pp. 14-15). She expands on this theme in "The Necessities of Aunt Chloe," seeking a "responsible dream of the cultural democrat," based on three principles: (1) "that each of us — no matter what our race, class, gender, or religion — deserves access to literacy, education, arts and letters, and public speech"; (2) that "each of us can participate in the scripting and producing of our cultural identities. ... We are the *autuers* of the films of our experience;" and (3) that "when we try to understand the past and present of our own culture, we must listen respectfully for the presence of many voices, not just one."

It is not the intention here to cover struggles within American universities over the content of curriculum, or philosophic struggles within each discipline on which some of the broader debate is based. General discussion of the political basis of this debate within the academy is provided by Catherine Gira in "Humanities in Academe: Politics or Pedagogy," in *Maryland Humanities*.

In remarks by Edward Rosenberry, "The Embattled Humanities: Another View," printed in *The Key Reporter* of Phi Beta Kappa (Spring, 1989, Vol. 54, No. 3), the current discussion is likened to what Jonathan Swift 300 years ago called "The Battle of the Books." Rosenberry takes the current debate back to Coleridge's observation that 'every man is born an Aristotelian or a Platonist,' and that the advocates of traditional great books are "Platonists in an Aristotelian world."

In an article that addresses the continuing (and contentious) debate, Elizabeth Beverly and Richard Wightman Fox note that the argument is "... too predictable," and call on liberals to accept the conservative's argument "... that teaching the humanities means teaching about values." They argue that this is not served in a pluralistic society by "... no-fault culture," or a "... glib embrace of novelty," but by persuading cultures to speak to one another and learn each others' moral values, not based on "... mindless relativism," but on "... culturally informed grappling with conflicting moral truths." (The *Chronicle*, November 1, 1989)

What is significant about the debate within the academy for current purposes is that it has implications for public humanities. Although most academicians agree on the value of educating in the humanities, dramatic division has developed over the content of the culture being conveyed — in both university and public settings. Sides are roughly characterized as those held captive to canon and those adrift in relativism. This debate is "political" in the sense that politics is the arena for resolving conflicting and contested values, and it is values that are at the core of the debate. A Martian might assume our definition of "politicizing" is holding views other than one's own, and might further wonder about the success of humanities education in teaching civil discourse, Socratic dialogue, open inquiry, toleration, and empathy.

[Another political dimension of the humanities, beyond the scope of this essay (an issue not confined to the humanities, but confronting the arts and sciences as well) is that of patronage and content. When the piper is paid by public tax dollars or by profits of corporate success (through sales of goods or services to the public or to the government), what impact does or should that support have on the tune — on its melody, harmony, interpretation, instrumentation, aesthetics, affect, or lack of these? Here yet another area of ongoing public discussion.]

Reconnecting the Humanities and Public Life

To launch discussion of scholarship and the public humanities at a meeting of the National Task Force on Scholarship and the Public Humanities, co-sponsored by the ACLS and the Federation of State Humanities Councils, James Quay and James Veninga address a theme central to such deliberation: how to "... connect scholarship in the humanities with the life of the nation," how "... public service scholarship" can improve the "... content of the civic conversation."

They begin by identifying factors which "... promise to affect American culture into the next century" — migrations across national borders; continued population growth; development and deployment of information technologies; media and communications, and the growth of a "monoculture." After developing these themes, they conclude with a call for "... new literacies for the twenty-first century, literacies informed by the humanities."

Each literacy is accompanied by a suggested text: "multicultural literacy," (as raised in the essay "How to Be A North American," by

philosopher Alasdair Macintyre); "civic literacy" (as articulated in the work by Merrill Peterson, *The Humanities and the American Promise*), and "community literacy" (a theme underlying Robert Bellah's lecture, "The Humanities and the Survival of Community"). [An earlier work, Robert Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart*, New York: Harper & Row, 1985, 355 pp., should be noted here as a related work on, as its subtitle reflects, ". . . individualism and commitment in American life."] Although intended by its authors as a working paper rather than manifesto, "Making Connections: The Humanities, Culture, and Community" expresses a vision for the role of humanities scholarship in American public life which can serve as a starting point for continuing discussion on this rich theme.

Reflections on the Readings

Some reactions to the diverse materials on the humanities and public life, and some conclusions drawn from these readings are:

- that the subject is extremely complex: major commissions and colloquia involving thoughtful American scholars and leaders over extended periods (one to two years) conclude that the subject is more complex than they had imagined when they began; and that study and discussion reveal more, not less, complexity.

- that the subject is not only complex, but disquieting: it touches sensitive places, arouses reaction, stirs debate, elicits discomfort. Many studies based on meetings of commissions or conferences acknowledge (and about others it is known) that discussion was difficult, characterized by strong feeling, division, sometimes contentiousness. This probably indicates how deeply humanities discussion itself touches the core of human beings, probes their complex centers and values, forces confronting the discomfort of living with the imprecise, indefinable, often inexpressible and inexplicable not only in the humanities but in themselves. It may also indicate (Carl Bode, past Chair of the Maryland Humanities Council, suggested to me) that it is because the humanities ask us to be better than we are, or than we think we are; perhaps make us feel we are falling short of what we can be.

- that the way in which people define or describe the humanities determines a great deal about how they view its value and use; and vice versa.

• that the humanities — and the discussion of the humanities — have histories: evolution and change through time are characteristic of the humanities; this history is part of the discussion, and the discussion part of the history.

• that the tension — and dynamism — of the discussion is governed by continuing "dialectics" surrounding private values and public role, high and popular culture, exclusionary and inclusionary canon; and that these "dialectics" are a powerful force and dynamic source fueling discussion in and of the humanities. The humanities debate is itself a public debate and a continuing one, and is itself part of the humanities.

• that an interesting sidelight to the problem of definition is the problem of classification. As all works are classified by terms used in a specific way at a specific time, the future will learn about us through knowing the names we called things; and we, about the past, through knowing their terms. When definition is elusive or complex, classification is no easier.

Library of Congress computerized bibliographic searches, for example, reveal works under a broader range of call numbers than one would expect when searching "the humanities" (not to mention the reaction of reference librarians to the additional phrase "in American life," or "the public humanities.") While these computerized bibliographic data bases do not offer definition of the humanities at the beginning of a subject search under "humanities," the old Library of Congress card catalogue does. In what now appears a quaint kindness offered to searchers, a two-card entry typed unevenly on a manual typewriter reads: Humanities. The studies or branches of learning, collectively, which deal with man and his affairs as contrasted (historically) with (1) nature (natural sciences) and (2) the divine (theology and religion). Corresponds, in general, with 'geisteswissenschaften,' 'humanistic studies,' and 'polite learning,' etc. Includes art and letters, classical studies, the social sciences, history, philosophy, etc. To be used only for works treating of so many of these studies that it is not practicable to make subject entries for each of the [sic] (e.g., art, literature, language and languages, classical education, social sciences, history, philosophy, etc.).

• that the quest to classify, define, and build models in the humanities, although suited to practical needs of universities, governments, and

library cataloging, surrenders to an unsuitable social science approach that risks limiting or restricting the humanities.

- that core agreement exists on the value to the individual of knowledge, reason, and reflection; and on the value to a community or society of informed and thoughtful discourse in a democracy, republic, or civic polity.

- that for these and other reasons, it is valuable for scholars, members of state councils, and others involved in the humanities, to continue discussion of how to think about and talk about these core issues underlying our work: exploring, analyzing, and interpreting together what we mean (or want to mean) when we talk about the humanities "in" or "and" public life, their relation to public policy, and how these relate to each other. What are the essential elements and issues of the discussion and debate?; have they changed since we started addressing them in the 1970's?; should we be asking different questions?; what questions should we be asking?; is there a place of consensus among us? (this essay argues below that there can be); where should we go from here?

Or, to put it another way, applying humanities methods and approaches to our consideration of the basic assumptions underlying our work — questions which like others in the humanities are complex, evade easy answers, raise questions of values and value, meaning and means, theory and justification — should be valuable and rewarding; and, indeed, even pleasurable and exhilarating.

Conclusion
Seeking a Common Ground: Culture's New Frontier

Where do we go from here? Beyond the binary bind, I would submit, and the adversarial arguments that pit against each other private value and public role, academy and community, theory and practice, fact and value, elitism and inclusion, canon and pluralism, and other divisions barring shared values among humanists, to affirm a pragmatic common ground that addresses both our "use" of the humanities and our justification of their "value."

As human beings, we exercise vast power over a complex realm of options: we are all blessed and burdened with choice, including the choice not to choose. We shape our lives and communities every time we act — and don't act. And every time we decide, we draw on both knowledge and values.

If, as people involved professionally in the humanities, we believe that considered, concerned, thoughtful, and informed choice based on reflection, perspective, context, and critical thinking is better than action based on ignorant, prejudiced, parochial, haphazard, or arrogant thinking, what options do we have but to overcome differences and affirm a pragmatic common ground in which individual and civic life are shaped by decisions and discourse informed by humanities perspectives and approaches?

What is the alternative? A Gresham's Law of the Humanities, with bad deliberation driving good from the marketplace? The continuation of political polarization and determined detachment; the ascendancy of the immediate and the amateur, and the irrelevancy of the profound and the professional, the authentic and the accurate? "Two cultures" — of humanities "have's" and "have-not's"?

Secondly, to take the pragmatic, empirical approach one step further, to argue that because many choices we face — even when choosing not to act — involve an ever broadening constituency in the discussion, participation should be extended both vertically — to those in our society who are now nonparticipants in the discussion; as well as horizontally — across national borders, toward worldwide, global discourse.

Within nations, among nations, and throughout populations mixed by recent massive migrations, more not fewer complex questions arise. Opening the inquiry, extending access to discussion, empowering all

human beings to become involved in conscious consideration of human experience, become not only prudent but essential.

The challenge will increasingly be to establish ways to grapple on a continuing basis with complicated issues we confront as human beings. And in this process, discussion can only benefit by what the humanities have to offer in providing perspective and context, insight and understanding, methods of critical thinking and analysis, ways to frame questions for inquiry, and experience in "... the best that has been thought and said in the world."

Finally, those of us engaged professionally in the humanities should end the division between the study of mankind and the mankind studied, to see people as not only the subjects and objects of study in the humanities, nor simply "publics" or "audiences" to be "reached," but owners and users of the humanities, partners in the enterprise of inquiry — humanities reconnected to humanity.

This is not to argue for instrumentalism or utilitarianism — for seeing utility as the purpose or end of the humanities. Nor is it to argue for a mechanistic, positivist, or scientific application of the humanities to decision making or problem-solving. It is also not a plea for easing disciplined, rigorous, and precise approaches, nor for discarding subtle, symbolic, provisional, and imaginative thinking in the humanities, to streamline them to gain further mileage. And finally, it is certainly not to argue for the end of argument, for the obliteration of differences, dialogue, and diversity of view that have always characterized, enriched, and energized the humanities.

This is culture's new frontier: meeting the challenge of diverse populations at home, newly enfranchised citizenries abroad, and interconnections among them all in an interdependent and migratory world. In this great uncharted region, territory whose traditional values have been stirred, but not re-formed, it is essential that the humanities stake a claim. Based on a pragmatic vision, humanities perspectives and approaches can be shared broadly and deeply among human beings confronted with disturbing, divisive, complex, and value-laden concerns, toward developing informed decisions and thoughtful choices in our communities, our nation, and our world. Here, again, what is the alternative? especially when we consider what humanities scholars of the future may be writing about us.

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Note: On the theme "The Scholar in Society," Wayne Booth (above) provides a bibliography of over 30 selected titles including works by Jacques Barzun, Gerlad Holton, Howard Mumford Jones, Samuel Eliot Morison, Max Weber, et al. Russell Jacoby's recent work (above) focuses on related themes, and includes discussion of writers Booth lists in his bibliography. The Hastings Center Report, *On The Uses of the Humanities*, also includes bibliographic notes, pp. 66-72.

Appendix
User's Guide To The Humanities

The Term "Humanities"

Sick Dogs and other Misconceptions:

The *term* "humanities" seems an obvious place to begin. It is also the most difficult. People working in the humanities are often asked to cure sick dogs, provide disaster relief, or — most difficult — to explain to friends or family what they do. People sometimes confuse the word "humanities" with the words "humane" and "humanitarian," sometimes chafe at the abstractness of the term.

Why is Defining The Term So Difficult?

- Because the humanities are abstract: they deal with ideas rather than techniques or skills; with human efforts to understand, interpret, explain, and find meaning in life. Since they deal with human experience and the human condition, they are as complex, indefinable, and often as ambiguous as human beings.

- Because they deal with questions which have no easy, final, or conclusive answers; often, no answers at all. Since it is also human to crave answers, definitions, clarity, and classification, people feel uncomfortable and unsatisfied, even frustrated and dissatisfied with the unclear and unanswerable in the humanities (as in human life itself).

- Because talking about the term "humanities" depends on language, on words and their meanings; and language is not precise, but symbolic, representational, connotative.

- Because the idea of the humanities, and use of the term, have evolved over time, and continue to change. The humanities have a history, a history of constant change.

Although that history, too, is complex, it is commonly said that the term "humanism" goes back to the Renaissance rediscovery of the culture of ancient Greece and Rome. The goal of humanists who cultivated this learning was not simply academic knowledge, but the development of character, refined sensibilities, and civic virtue.

The establishment of the professional fields of knowledge we know today did not begin until the last quarter of the 19th century. The goal

of such fields, like the German scholarship they emulated, was scientific objectivity — systems, precision, specialization, and search for facts — with the aim of adding to a body of human knowledge and texts, while keeping the pursuit and the products "value-free."

In fact, it was not until the 19th century, that English (as opposed to Greek, Latin, and Hebrew) was considered sufficiently respectable as a language of expression that universities created professorships in English literature.

The modern use of the word "humanities," as one of three divisions of knowledge (the other two, science and social science), is a 20th century development.

- Because the term is used in at least two ways: to describe ways of thinking, and to denote specific academic disciplines that explore human experience and values, past and present.

Congressional legislation, federal agencies, universities and colleges, use definitions based on subject specialties to set boundaries, to include and exclude areas for funding, specialized research, courses, buildings, and budgets. Specialized scholarship in the humanities may explore themes and use language that make the works inaccessible to those outside the discipline, and make the humanities appear obscure or mysterious.

- Because the humanities are often described in terms of what they are not, in the phrase "as opposed to . . . ." They are defined in contrast to the arts, to the sciences, to the social sciences, to divinity.

The victory of specialization in academic disciplines has set apparent boundaries within the world of knowledge. The humanities, once broadly seen to encompass the arts — creative expression of the human condition — are posed in apparent juxtaposition to anything else.

The humanities were and are part of the "liberal arts," studies and approaches which "liberate" the mind rather than impart technical, mechanical, or vocational skills. Traditionally seen as a single, related body of knowledge about human and natural life, the liberal arts included and include not only what we now call the humanities and the arts, but also the natural and social sciences. University degrees still reflect this broad meaning in their names, Bachelor and Master of Arts.

- Because the humanities have both an individual and a public dimension: they enrich an individual's life, but also provide for informed community living in a democracy.

- And, because the humanities can make people uncomfortable. They may do so by their ambiguity; but also by threatening the certainty of those who believe they have "the answers," because the humanities ask questions about those "answers." And they may also make people uncomfortable (as Carl Bode, past Chairman of the Maryland Humanities Council suggested to me) by calling on us to become better than we are, or believe we are; to challenge us to become all we can be.

How, Then, Can We Talk About the Humanities? What Do We Mean When We Use the Term?

The humanities are easier to describe than to define.

The Federation of State Humanities Councils sees them as:

> . . . ways of thinking about what is human — about our diverse histories, imaginations, values, words, and dreams. The humanities analyze, interpret, and refine our experience, and its comedies and tragedies, struggles and achievements. They embrace history and art history, literature and film, philosophy and morality, comparative religion, jurisprudence, political theory, languages, linguistics, anthropology, and some of the inquiries of the social sciences. When we ask who we are, and what our lives ought to mean, we are using the humanities. (*State Councils*, 1985, p. 1)

Another approach to what we mean by the humanities is stated by the historian Merrill Peterson in *The Humanities and the American Promise*:

> . . . wherever human beings remember, think, interpret, analyze; wherever they deal seriously with each other's conduct; wherever they try to understand life's meaning, . . . there we see the fundamentally human impulse from which the humanities spring. But, like most things in nature, the humanities are improved by art — giving form to what is raw, spontaneous, and disconnected and offering disciplined medium for the study of burning human questions. (Peterson, p. 27)

The National Endowment for the Humanities, in its orientation notebook for new members of state councils, describes the humanities as branches of learning which deal with what is fundamentally and essentially human, the attributes which distinguish human beings from all other natural beings: self-consciousness, language, reason, creativity, human values and aspirations, and the products of all of these. They note that the humanities concern themselves with the experience of being human — explore it, analyze it, interpret and refine it, while at the same time adding to it. At the core of the humanities are questions of value and justification, meaning and interpretation. And the United States Congress, in establishing the National Endowment for the Humanities, defined the humanities by academic fields:

> The humanities include but are not limited to: history, philosophy, language, both modern and classical, literature, linguistics, archaeology, jurisprudence, ethics, comparative religion, the history, criticism and theory of the arts, and those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ historical or philosophical approaches.

State councils have described the humanities as ways to think about what human beings have said, done, thought, and created. The humanities study the records of human culture, connecting past to present, individuals to societies, values to actions, emotion to reason. They analyze and interpret our experience; they reflect on the human condition.

What, then, are the humanities? Ways of both thinking about human experience, and organizing this pursuit into academic disciplines or fields of study. The humanities are both the pursuits (the disciplines, fields, and bodies of learning), and the pursuing (process, activity, and approaches).

They spring from human curiosity, from our desire to understand and reflect on our lives and our world. They derive from our impulse to remember and project; to imagine and create; to explore and explain; to reason and know; to wonder, search, and discover.

The goal of humanistic study is to shed light on the human condition and the human experience.

Or, as a member of our Maryland Humanities Council, Margret Zassenhaus, put it:

> They help us understand what makes us tick — and what motivates us to do good and evil . . . how to tell good from evil, and how to know kitch and glitz from beauty . . . how to know what's good and what's true.

Of What Value or Use are They?

Private Lives . . .

We all ask humanities questions. When we chose and decide, we all think and analyze, draw on our values, engage experiences, and look to the past. The question is not whether we participate in humanities activities, but how well we do.

We use results of humanities inquiry more effectively when we draw consciously on the lives, events, and experiences of other times and places, on the reflections of others who have thought about good and evil, right and wrong, justice and injustice — in history, literature, and philosophy.

We "use" them as Merrill Peterson has noted, to bring meaning to our own life, and to develop habits of mind; to heighten our consciousness; and to facilitate shared discourse that forms the basis of informed community life. (Peterson, *The Humanities and the American Promise)*

Or, as the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, Lynne Cheney, stated:

> The humanities move us with images, arguments, and stories about what it means to be human: to mourn mortality for ourselves and those we love; to know joy and find purpose, nonetheless; to be capable of good and evil, wisdom and folly. (*The Humanities in American Life,* p. 7)

In sum, the humanities enrich our individual lives by helping us know ourselves better, to be more fully aware and conscious of ourselves — our strengths and weaknesses, our potential for good and evil, our uniqueness and complexity, what we value and what we deplore.

And Public Good

They also help us live with other people in communities. Shared culture, shared knowledge and values, create bonds of community without which divisiveness, special interests, and selfishness can prevail. We may not be able fully to identify and define the content of our culture in all its dynamic complexity, but we can still share an attitude toward the quest and inquiry, to value a humanities approach which respects the dignity of each individual, and the diversity and richness provided by the unique contribution of each.

At a time that our democracy involves ever more people in decision making, and traditional structures (family, schools, religious institutions, and communities) are seen to be undergoing major change (some say disintegration), all of us are faced with choices about how to live our lives, how to deal with problems in our communities. The toughest questions we face in our personal and community lives do not have easy or lasting answers. They are intertwined with values, often competing ones. They may have virtue on all sides, but only one which can prevail; or may involve flagrant evil or tragedy, but lack apparent solution. They may require allocating limited resources among major critical needs.

In grappling with these complicated matters, the humanities can help by offering a broad range of human experience; by providing perspective, insight, and wisdom, as well as ways to approach questions through analysis and critical thinking. They can help us clarify our values and frame issues intelligently to make informed decisions and thoughtful choices. And in these ways, they can foster an informed, thoughtful, responsible, and empathetic citizenry over its alternative, an ignorant, complacent, or bigoted one.

Just as we live in a world shaped by the choices our parents and grandparents made — and didn't make — during their lives, our children and grandchildren will inherit a world shaped by the way we have lived, thought, decided, and acted in ours.

And since there are no easy or lasting answers to the complex issues facing us, we will all have to grapple on a continuing basis with continuing issues. The question is not whether we will, but how wisely and well.

What Do Fields in the Humanities Do?

Each field of the humanities approaches the study of the human condition in a different way, has a different body of works, and offers different understandings.

Literature takes us beyond our personal limitations of time, place, culture, and gender, by involving us in other real or imagined lives, eras, and societies. It connects us to the range of human experience and emotion; offers us an experience in esthetics, meaning, value, character, and language.

History gives us a sense of the past as we consider the present and look to the future. Since we are what we have become — products of the past — history explains us to ourselves. It also provides perspectives and contexts in which to view the present.

Philosophy helps us think systemically and logically, to frame questions, and construct arguments about complex issues concerning values and ideals; to form ways to judge and evaluate complicated matters; to separate questions that can be answered from those that cannot. It teaches us to analyze elements of an argument, and to avoid the pitfalls of simplistic or bogus argument — our own or others'.

Language communicates and connects us with one other, in ways that are not only precise and informative, but imaginative and evocative.

And art, music, and theater nourish our souls, express ourselves and our culture in creation and performance, enriched by the deeper understanding of them the humanities provide.

Where Do We Find The Humanities?

Traditionally, the humanities disciplines have been pursued in colleges, universities, and schools. Outside the universities, Americans in their quest for life-long learning founded Lyceums and Chautauquas which flourished in the 19th century, providing lectures and dramatizations on a broad array of subjects. But neither of these 19th-century efforts was devoted exclusively to the humanities, nor designed as an exchange between scholars and the general public.

Since the 1970's a resurgence of interest in learning beyond school is being met with opportunities for all citizens to participate in humanities inquiry and discussion in their communities. Especially since the

establishment of the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1965, and its affiliated state councils beginning in 1970, a dynamic experiment has begun in bringing the humanities into American public life. Programs of state humanities councils — programs in libraries and museums, on public television, in films and exhibits — have become what the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities has characterized as a kind of "parallel school." (See *Humanities In America* for her discussion of this theme.)

At public programs in the humanities, millions of citizens each year come together with humanities scholars to wrestle with significant civic, ethical, literary, philosophic, and historical themes and questions. They engage with the humanities through books, films, town meetings, conferences, discussions, radio and television, roundtables, exhibits, dramatizations, archaeological sites, to challenge their minds and imaginations, enrich their lives, strengthen their communities.

Almost 160 years ago, Alexis de Tocqueville anticipated, during his visit to the United States, that the need for such programs might arise. He observed that:

> Men who live in ages of equality have a great deal of curiosity and little leisure; their life is so practical, so confused, so excited, and so active that but little time remains to them for thought. (*Democracy in America*, Vol. II, chap. 3, Vantage Books edition, 1960)

But millions of Americans (25 million at state council programs last year) found time for thought. And in doing so, have brought reality to the dream for America expressed more than 100 years ago by poet Walt Whitman, for:

> . . . a programme of culture, drawn out not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture rooms, but with an eye to practical life, the west, the workingmen, the facts of farms and jackplanes and engineers, and of the broad range of women also. (Quoted in Peterson, p. 10)

What, If Anything, Can We Conclude From This?

That the humanities are not for the quick fix. They cannot themselves make decisions, provide easy answers to complicated questions, end poverty, prevent war, stop crime, or cure disease.

But if the humanities do not solve problems, they provide background, approaches, and perspectives that help us deal with complex issues facing us in our personal lives, and within our communities, nation, and world.

The humanities can console, but they can also unsettle, disturb, and disrupt. They challenge and question our certainties. Like human life itself, they require living with the gray areas, issues that cannot be defined, questions that have no answers.

We are never too old for the humanities. In fact, they are one of the few things that you do better with age, and that get better with age.

We are never too poor for the humanities. They are available in many places without cost to the user.

We are never too "dumb" for the humanities. They are not a contest; they do not require special tests; they are not a competition.

The humanities don't belong to other people: they belong to us all. We human beings are their owners and users, the connection between the humanities and humanity.

And they can provide us all with the sheer satisfaction, excitement, delight, and reward of reaching out to share the full range of experience human beings have known and experienced, to live our lives with all the depth, richness, texture, and vitality of which we are capable.

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